

Assembly Bill No. 2287

CHAPTER 455

An act to amend Section 22820 of the Government Code, relating to firefighters' benefits.

[Approved by Governor September 27, 2008. Filed with
Secretary of State September 27, 2008.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 2287, Evans. Firefighters: benefits.

The Public Employees' Medical and Hospital Care Act provides continuing health benefit coverage to the surviving spouse, as defined, or eligible family member of a firefighter or peace officer who dies as a result of an injury or disease sustained in the line of duty, including a firefighter employed by the federal government who was a resident of, and whose regular duty assignment was to perform firefighting services in, this state. Contributions paid by those persons and the state are deposited into one of 2 continuously appropriated funds to provide that coverage. Existing law requires the employer of the deceased firefighter or peace officer to notify the Board of Administration of the Public Employees' Retirement System within 10 days of the death of the employee if a spouse or family member may be eligible for enrollment in a health benefit plan under those provisions.

This bill would instead require the employer of the deceased firefighter or peace officer to make that notification within 10 business days of the employee's death. The bill would also make technical, clarifying changes to that definition of a surviving spouse.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 22820 of the Government Code is amended to read:

22820. (a) Upon the death, on or after January 1, 2002, of a firefighter employed by a county, city, city and county, district, or other political subdivision of the state, a firefighter employed by the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, a firefighter employed by the federal government who was a resident of this state and whose regular duty assignment was to perform firefighting services within this state, or a peace officer as defined in Section 830.1, 830.2, 830.3, 830.31, 830.32, 830.33, 830.34, 830.35, 830.36, 830.37, 830.38, 830.39, 830.4, 830.5, 830.55, or 830.6 of the Penal Code, if the death occurred as a result of injury or disease arising out of and in the course of his or her official duties, the surviving spouse or other eligible family member of the deceased firefighter or peace officer, if uninsured, is deemed

to be an annuitant under Section 22760 for purposes of enrollment. All eligible family members of the deceased firefighter or peace officer who are uninsured may enroll in a health benefit plan of the surviving spouse's choice. However, an unmarried child of the surviving spouse is not eligible to enroll in a health benefit plan under this section if the child was not a family member under Section 22775 and regulations pertinent thereto prior to the firefighter's or peace officer's date of death. The employer of the deceased firefighter or peace officer shall notify the board within 10 business days of the death of the employee if a spouse or family member may be eligible for enrollment in a health benefit plan under this section.

(b) Upon notification, the board shall promptly determine eligibility and shall forward to the eligible spouse or family member the materials necessary for enrollment. In the event of a dispute regarding whether a firefighter's or peace officer's death occurred as a result of injury or disease arising out of and in the course of his or her official duties as required under subdivision (a), that dispute shall be determined by the Workers' Compensation Appeals Board, subject to the same procedures and standards applicable to hearings relating to claims for workers' compensation benefits. The jurisdiction of the Workers' Compensation Appeals Board under this section is limited to the sole issue of industrial causation and this section does not authorize the Workers' Compensation Appeals Board to award costs against the system.

(c) (1) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, and except as otherwise provided in subdivision (d), the state shall pay the employer contribution required for enrollment under this part for the uninsured surviving spouse of a deceased firefighter or peace officer for life, and the other uninsured eligible family members of a deceased firefighter or peace officer, provided the family member meets the eligibility requirements of Section 22775 and regulations pertinent thereto.

(2) The contribution payable by the state for each uninsured surviving spouse and other uninsured eligible family members shall be adjusted annually and be equal to the amount specified in Section 22871.

(3) The state's contribution under this section shall commence on the effective date of enrollment of the uninsured surviving spouse or other uninsured eligible family members. The contribution of each surviving spouse and eligible family member shall be the total cost per month of the benefit coverage afforded him or her under the plan less the portion contributed by the state pursuant to this section.

(d) The cancellation of coverage by an annuitant, as defined in this section, shall be final without option to reenroll, unless coverage is canceled because of enrollment in an insurance plan from another source.

(e) For purposes of this section, "surviving spouse" means a spouse who was married to the deceased firefighter or peace officer on the deceased's date of death and either was married for a continuous period of at least one year prior to the date of death or was married to the deceased prior to the date the deceased firefighter or peace officer sustained the injury or disease resulting in death.

(f) For purposes of this section, “uninsured” means that the surviving spouse is not enrolled in an employer-sponsored health plan under which the employer contribution covers 100 percent of the cost of health care premiums.

(g) The board has no duty to identify, locate, or notify any surviving spouse or eligible family member who may be or may become eligible for benefits under this section.

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